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Testimony of Phil Sherwood
Deputy Director, Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG)
Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee
Monday, February 22, 2010

My name is Phil Sherwood and I am the Deputy Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG). CCAG is a membership based organization comprised of 25,000 members statewide and has been active in Connecticut for nearly 40 years.

We would like to thank the members of the GAE Committee for having this hearing at this crucial time and would like to express organizational support for **H. B. No. 5022 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CITIZENS' ELECTION PROGRAM & H. B. No. 5021 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE CITIZENS' ELECTION PROGRAM.**

Scandals over the past decade have cost taxpayers millions of dollars in bad deals, no bid contracts and an erosion of public trust. The political system then had candidates having to endure the never ending quest for large private contributions from many of the same people that would eventually later be asking for favors in return. This did little to incentivize the involvement of new candidates or public participation. The system was broken. But that was then.

The new Citizens' Election Program has successfully opened the door to legitimate candidates and has done so while encouraging all candidates to spend their time courting small donors and voters in their districts rather than large private contributors. This has enabled candidates to spend more time communicating their values and issues with voters.

The transition from the old system to the new Citizens' Election system was extremely successful. About 80% of the candidates for state office used the system. This is significantly higher than the participation rates in the first election cycles in the other states that have similar versions of public financing.

CCAG would like to express disappointment that action has not already been taken in response to the Second Circuit Court ruling. Inaction from the General Assembly has diminished the confidence in the Citizens' Election Program and is contributing to candidates' decisions to not use the program.

The repeal of 9-717 (reversion clause) is important and repealed in both bills. Should the state lose on appeal, repealing the reversion clause would provide candidates already running for statewide office greater confidence that the Citizens' Election Program will be there. Not doing so could result in the clock being turned back to the pre-reform election laws of 2005.

We like that RB 5022 provides a match of additional small donor funds for a candidate that is the target of negative independent expenditure. This provision is absent in the Governor's bill.



Establishing strong trigger mechanisms for matching funds is more important than ever given the radical Constitutional interpretations recently handed down by the US Supreme Court. The Court gutted a century worth of well-settled election law and unraveled longstanding principles designed to protect democracy from immense aggregations of wealth.

The Court also overruled a portion of McConnell, decided in just 2003, allowing corporations to bombard the electorate with political advertisements that directly call for the election or defeat of candidates and allow them to pay for these ads out of their general treasury funds. Strong public financing programs are the best way to provide candidates with an option to run for public office in a way that frees them from special interest money.

CCAG has concerns about reducing grant amounts to participating candidates, especially those running for statewide office. Reducing grant totals risks turning the Program into an incumbent protection program by creating a barrier for less known candidates to run competitive campaigns and will deter them from running altogether. Reducing grant totals will entice candidates to opt out of the Citizens' Election program, actually increasing the flow of big donor private money into the election process.

We completely understand the state is struggling with a budget deficit. The General Assembly and the Governor have already cut more than \$39 million from the Citizens' Election program in the last 15 months. It is vital that this program is available to candidates for the 2010 election cycle and measures be taken to protect this law. We believe this program pays for itself as an anti-corruption tool.

I would like to thank Senator Gayle Slossberg and Representative James Spallone for their efforts in constructing RB 5022 in an effort to preserve this important program.

Phil Sherwood,
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